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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the sex role attitudes of teachers, administrators, and other occupational groups. Respondents' sex role attitudes were measured in the areas of home, children, work, and politics. The results indicate that teachers may be less prejudiced than most occupational groups but are similar in sex role attitudes to other professionals. Within the teaching profession, kindergarten and elementary teachers appear slightly more biased than secondary school teachers and administrators. Implications of the findings are discussed. (Author/CJ)

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ARE EDUCATORS MORE SEX-ROLE BIASED THAN OTHER AMERICANS?: A COMPARATIVE NATIONAL STUDY OF ATTITUDES AMONG TEACHERS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

ARE EDUCATORS MORE SEX-ROLE BIASED THAN OTHER AMERICANS?:
A COMPARATIVE NATIONAL STUDY OF ATTITUDES
AMONG TEACHERS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

This research investigates the sex-role attitudes of school teachers, school administrators, other professionals and general occupation groups, utilizing data from six national samples gathered as part of the General Social Survey between 1972 and 1977 by the National Opinion Research Center (N = 9120). Respondents' sex-role attitudes were measured in the following areas: home, children, work and politics. The results indicate that teachers may be less prejudiced than most occupational groups, but comparable to other professionals. Within the teaching profession, kindergarten and elementary teachers appear slightly more sex-role biased than secondary school teachers. Implications of these findings are discussed.

ARE EDUCATORS MORE SEX-ROLE BIASED THAN OTHER AMERICANS?:
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In recent years schools have been increasingly viewed as a major source for social change and progress in American society. The school system has been seen by many as a vehicle for providing equal opportunity for all members of the society and for potentially reducing the prejudice and discrimination based on sex. This expectation is exemplified in the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requiring that various forms of sex discrimination in education be discontinued and that procedures be implemented to affirm equality of opportunity for females and males in all educational institutions receiving Federal funds.

The effectiveness of the school in bringing about constructive social change or simply perpetuating the status quo depends in large part upon the organizational environment, the competencies of the teaching staff and the instructional resources. However, the predispositions of teachers and administrators, their affective reactions and their attitudes play key roles in facilitating or impeding student learning, development and self concept. The attitudes and beliefs of teachers and administrators can have profound effects on efforts to provide equal opportunity and to reduce sexual prejudice in a number of ways. First, the attitudes of school administrators and school teachers may be important in establishing the norms for implementation of Title IX guidelines (13, 17, 18). If the school board members, school superintendents, the principal and the teachers reluctantly comply with federal guidelines to eradicate formal sex bias, but convey their displeasure or negative attitudes to the children and their parents, they are likely to create or augment a social

norm that discourages change in attitudes and behavior. In addition, teachers' attitudes and expectations may play an important role in the classroom. Several researchers have shown that teachers' attitudes toward particular groups and their expectations regarding their performance will affect the teachers' behavior toward those groups and may influence the actual performance of the students (2, 3, 5, 13).

Despite the potentially important effect of teachers' and administrators' sex-role attitudes, there is little research on teachers' general sex-role attitudes, and even less on comparisons between teachers' attitudes and those of the broader population (17). In the last decade, however, researchers have begun to examine teachers' expectations and attitudes and to document teachers' differential treatment of students based on the sex of the student (4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14). These studies have generally found differential teacher attitudes and behaviors based on the sex of the child which militate against an equal opportunity for the acquisition of academic competencies and for exposure to a variety of experiences and training. These studies, however, have focused primarily on teachers' attitudes and behavior regarding particular groups of students and have often been limited to a single classroom or school, or when larger in scope, to teacher populations only. Therefore, this study expands the scope of previous research by contrasting and comparing general sex-role attitudes in four areas among a national sample of elementary and secondary school teachers, school administrators, and other professional and general occupational groups.

Procedures

Sex-role attitudes among school teachers and administrators and other occupational groups were analyzed utilizing data from six national samples gathered as part of the General Social Survey between 1972 and 1977 (N = 9120).

A combination of probability and block quota sampling techniques were employed by the National Opinion Research Center to provide a representative national sample of responses on a wide range of issues. For additional details on sampling design and field work and interviewer specifications see Davis (6).

The occupational categories in this study were derived from the three digit 1970 US Census occupational codes. The occupational groups included: 1) Professionals, Technical and Kindred Workers; 2) Managers and Administrators except farm (examples--bank officers, office managers, insurance agents); 3) Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers; 4) Secondary School Teachers;[1] 5) School Administrators, elementary and secondary; 6) Clerical, Craftsman and Operatives (examples--bookkeepers, secretaries, carpenters, foremen, mechanics, assemblers); 7) Laborers, Farmers and Service Workers (examples--construction laborers, freight handlers, garbage collectors, janitors, cooks, maids).

Attitudes regarding perceptions of sex-roles were grouped into the following areas: home, children, work, politics. Respondents were asked if women should only or primarily take care of running the home and leave outside achievements and the running of the country to men. In addition, they were asked if they thought women should first help their husbands' careers before pursuing their own. Attitudes about children involved the perceived effects on children of a working mother and whether a wife should be able to refuse her husband's desires for children. In the area of work, respondents were asked if they approved of a married women working when her husband could support her or when there were limited jobs. Finally, respondents were asked about a woman's qualifications to serve in a public office and their views on the Equal Rights Amendment.

RESULTS

The analysis of sex-role attitudes among teachers and other occupational categories confirmed the previously reported relationship between social class

and prejudice (1, 15). The lower and working class respondents (clerical, craftsmen, operatives, laborers, farmers and service workers) were consistently more prejudiced against equal opportunities for women. In the area of work, for example, over two thirds of these groups agreed that married women should not work if jobs were limited and that it would be better for everyone involved if the man was the achiever outside the home and the woman took care of the home and family. Over half of these respondents agreed that men were better suited emotionally for politics than woman. In addition, a little less than a quarter of these respondents would not vote for a qualified woman for President. Finally, large numbers of clerical, craftsmen and operatives (70%), as well as laborers, farmers and service workers (68%), perceived preschool children to suffer if their mothers worked (Tables 1 and 2).

Teachers and school administrators, on the other hand, were more similar in their sex-role attitudes to the professionals, managers and administrators. This should not be surprising since according to the US Census occupational codes, elementary and secondary teachers are normally considered part of the professional category, while school administrators are included among Managers and Administrators. However, although these two major upper class groups (Professionals and Managers and Administrators), as well as the subgroups of school teachers and administrators, are less prejudiced than the majority of the population, they are certainly not devoid of sex-role prejudice. Some attitude items in particular illustrate the extent of prejudice among all strata of society. At least a third to nearly a half of the professionals, managers and teachers felt a wife should help her husband's career rather than pursuing her own. Larger percentages of these same groups (42% to 66%) also believed that preschool children suffer if the mother works and that it was much better if the woman took care of the home and family while the

man was the achiever outside the home. Finally, approximately two fifths of the teachers and over half of the professionals agreed that married women should not work if jobs are limited (Tables 1 and 2).

Another interesting finding was revealed in the comparison between elementary and secondary school teachers. As previously mentioned, both groups of teachers, while exhibiting widespread sex-role prejudice, were nevertheless among the least prejudiced groups on every attitude item. Teachers' sex-role attitudes paralleled the more tolerant attitudes of their fellow professionals in law, medicine, higher education, and engineering. However, there were slight but generally consistent attitude differences between elementary and secondary teachers. Although most differences between these two groups of teachers were not statistically significant ($p < .05$) due in part to the small number of teachers in the sample, secondary teachers were more open and less prejudiced than elementary teacher on seven of the nine attitude items measuring beliefs about sex-role (Wilcoxon signed ranks test, $p < .10$). For example, 42% of the elementary teachers believed that a wife should help her husband's career rather than pursuing her own, while 33% of the secondary teachers believed this. Moreover, 51% of the elementary teachers compared to 44% of the secondary teachers indicated that it was better if the man was the achiever outside the home. These preliminary findings warrant further investigation since several researchers (5, 16) have suggested the importance of early childhood influences. St. John (16) for example suggests that efforts to erode prejudice are probably more beneficial if they are begun in the early elementary years. Academic development, for example, is cumulative and the gaps in achievement in particular areas between two groups of children usually widen with age. Crano and Mellon (5) also find that in the early elementary grades, a teacher's affective response toward a child could have a very strong impact on that child's academic performance. While many of the attitude differences between elementary

and secondary teachers were not large, the slightly higher biases of elementary teachers may be significant in terms of lost opportunities.

The different sex composition and educational background of elementary and secondary teachers are among the possible reasons for these differences in sex-role biases. As noted earlier 83% of the elementary teachers and 58% of the secondary teachers in the sample were female. However, the correlation between sex and sex-role prejudice among the entire sample was generally small and often not significant. The educational background of these two groups of teachers also differed to some degree with 78% of the elementary teachers and 94% of the secondary teachers reporting they were college graduates. This may be a more viable explanation since education is moderately correlated with sex-role attitudes. However, both elementary and secondary teachers reported considerably more education than any other occupational group, including their own professional group. Quantitative educational differences at this level probably do not have marked effects on sex-role prejudice. Indeed in examining the differences in sex-role attitudes among those with a college education, the slight but consistent differerces between elementary and secondary teachers remained. However, there still may be substantive differences in the nature of the college education received by elementary and secondary teachers.

In sum, both elementary and secondary teachers, as well as school administrators, are among the least sex-role biased groups. However, there are large percentages of these socializing agents who possess negative sex-role attitudes. This was particularly true regarding perceptions that a woman's proper place is in the home caring for the children, that women should help their husbands' careers rather than pursuing their own, and that women are not as emotionally suited for politics as men. Finally, the secondary teachers appear

to be slightly but consistently more open to equal opportunities for women than their colleagues in the elementary school.

CONCLUSION

This paper began with the premise that sex-role attitudes of teachers and school administrators may be extremely important in setting the climate for establishing a constructive learning atmosphere in the classroom for both sexes. Examination of the attitudes of teachers and administrators was both promising and discouraging.

On the one hand, a considerable percentage of the school teachers, as well as school administrators, continue to display sex-role bias. As a consequence, these attitudes may thwart the goals established by Title IX and limit the possibility that the educational system may contribute to sexual equality. As mentioned earlier, Title IX legislation requires that major changes take place throughout the educational system to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys and men and women. While this legislation must involve explicit actions in the area of personnel, curriculum and the non-curricular aspects of the school system, it is likely that its success is also contingent upon modifying the deeply rooted sex-role beliefs and attitudes expressed by teachers in this study.

Another finding of this study was that a slightly larger percentage of elementary teachers than secondary teachers consistently responded with sex-role prejudiced answers. On some of the questions distribution of responses of the elementary teachers were closer to those of the more sexually prejudiced managers and administrators. This is somewhat disconcerting in light of the research and theories which suggest the importance of early childhood influences (16,5). The tone and climate provided by elementary teachers who are sex-role prejudiced may undermine the realization of these early opportunities.

On the other hand, school teachers and school administrators were no more

prejudiced than fellow members of the professions. They were also more favorable toward equal opportunities for women than the majority of Americans. If attitudes of teachers do indeed have substantial impact on the classroom atmosphere and social and academic performance of the students, then teachers and administrators may be providing a setting that improves upon the status quo.

Several important questions regarding teachers' sex-role attitudes remain only partially answered by the growing body of research. What role do the sex-role attitudes of teachers and school administrators play in establishing norms and a social climate for ensuring equal opportunities for both sexes. How do these attitudes affect specific classroom expectations and teachers' behavior? Are teachers conscious of their attitudes and the possible implications of their attitudes and their classroom behavior for the success or failure of their students?

If the teachers' attitudes do make a difference in the teaching-learning process as many researchers have indicated, can those attitudes be altered to instill more positive attitudes toward groups receiving prejudicial treatment? Finally, if we can succeed in maximizing teacher awareness, modifying deeply rooted attitudes and prejudices, and eliminating undesirable self-fulfilling prophecy effects, what are the broader limitations on a teacher's efforts to accomplish particular goals with given students during the school year? George Counts asked in 1932 "Dare the schools build a new social order?" (7: 491) Perhaps we should be asking: Can the schools build a new social order which provides for greater equality of opportunity for all members of the society and contributes to a reduction of prejudice and discrimination? Teachers' and adminstrators' attitudes are likely to be important factors affecting this possibility.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Since teachers constitute a small portion of the professional category there was a relatively small number of teachers in the national sample (205 kindergarten and elementary teachers, 133 secondary teachers). This number was further reduced by the fact that questions regarding sex-role prejudice were not asked in each year of the survey. However, the sample of teachers does appear to be representative. Among the two groups of teachers there were significant differences ($p < .01$) in the sex composition and educational backgrounds (kindergarten and elementary teachers 83% female, 78% college graduates; secondary teachers 58% female, 94% college graduates). These differences parallel the differences reported by the National Education Association Research Division (1977) in their national sample of teachers entitled Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1975-76.

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES BY OCCUPATION, 1972-1977.

Occupation[1]	HOME			CHILDREN		
	Help Husband Rather than Pursue Own Career	Agree Women Should Take Care of Home, Men the Country	Much Better if Man is Achiever Outside Home	Preschool Child Suffers if Mother Works	Working Mother Can't Be As Good a Mother	Wife Can't Refuse to Have Children
Professional	45 (147)[2]*	16* (419)	55* (151)	63* (149)	39* (149)	32* (136)
Managers, Admin.	49 (183)	27 (556)	54 (185)	66 (182)	47 (184)	26 (174)
Kindergarten and Elementary Teachers	42 (38)	22 (117)	51 (37)	42 (38)	32 (38)	23 (35)
Secondary School Teachers	33 (27)	19 (67)	44 (27)	57 (28)	29 (28)	29 (24)
School Administrators	--	11 (19)	--	--	--	--
Clerical, Craftsman and Operatives	62 (654)	39 (1899)	69 (673)	70 (673)	54 (674)	34 (615)
Laborers, Farmers and Service Workers	61 (310)	47 (919)	73 (313)	68 (316)	56 (318)	42 (288)

*Differences between 1) professionals, managers, kindergarten and elementary and secondary teachers, and 2) clerical, craftsman and operatives, laborers, farmers and service workers are significant $p < .01$.

[1]Occupational categories are determined by the three-digit number code assigned by the U.S. Census Bureau.

[2]Numbers in parentheses represent the number of respondents answering in each category in the data from six national samples gathered as part of the General Social Survey between 1972 and 1977 by the National Opinion Research Center (N = 9120)

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES BY OCCUPATION, 1972-1977.

Occupation[1]	WORK		POLITICS		
	Disapprove of Married Women Working if not Necessary	Agree Married Women Should not Work if Jobs are Limited	Not Vote for Qualified Women for President	Agree Men Better Suited Emotionally for Politics	Oppose Equal Rights Amendment
Professional	20 (569)[2]*	54* (147)	13* (570)	34* (340)	22* (142)
Managers, Admin.	23 (768)	54 (184)	19 (744)	44 (448)	23 (159)
Kindergarten and Elementary Teachers	15 (149)	43 (37)	21 (149)	40 (92)	22 (36)
Secondary School Teachers	16 (89)	39 (28)	15 (89)	34 (59)	19 (26)
School Administrators	17 (23)	--	17 (23)	50 (16)	--
Clerical, Craftsman and Operatives	34 (2557)	68 (671)	22 (2514)	51 (1565)	28 (534)
Laborers, Farmers and Services Workers	39 (1301)	68 (313)	24 (1277)	54 (759)	30 (226)

*Differences between 1) professionals, managers, kindergarten and elementary and secondary teachers, and 2) clerical, craftsman and operatives, laborers, farmers and service workers are significant $p < .01$.

[1]Occupational categories are determined by the three-digit number code assigned by the U.S. Census Bureau.

[2]Numbers in parentheses represent the number of respondents answering in each category in the data from six national samples gathered as part of the General Social Survey between 1972 and 1977 by the National Opinion Research Center (N = 9120).

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